



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION IX

75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94105-3901

MAR -9 1999

OFFICE OF THE
REGIONAL ADMINISTRATOR

Mr. Francis Palacio
President, La Puente Valley County Water District
15825 E. Main Street
P.O. Box 3136
La Puente, CA 91744

Dear Mr. Palacio:

Thank you for taking the time to write to Carol Browner to describe the problems that the La Puente Valley County Water District has faced since the discovery of perchlorate, N-nitrosodimethylamine (NDMA), and other contaminants in its groundwater supply. We recognize that the District has been among those hardest hit by contamination in the San Gabriel Valley, that the District has been forced to purchase water from neighboring water utilities, that customers have seen their water rates increase substantially, and that the District has borne the expense of treatment with little or no outside financial assistance.

I apologize for the delay in responding. My staff thought it best to wait to see the outcome of discussions that began in August between EPA, the Watermaster, and the Potentially Responsible Parties about several issues relevant to the District.

In your letter, you request that EPA provide financial support to those affected by the contamination and promptly pursue legal action against the parties responsible for the contamination.

We cannot offer direct financial assistance to the District, but we are trying to help in several ways. First, as you may know, EPA has adopted a groundwater cleanup plan for the Azusa-Irwindale-Baldwin Park area that calls for the large-scale extraction and treatment of contaminated groundwater. Construction and operation of the treatment systems called for in EPA's cleanup plan will, at a minimum, prevent higher levels of contamination from reaching the District's wells and will over time reduce the levels of contamination in water pumped from the District's wells. The cleanup plan calls for pumping approximately 30,000 acre-feet of contaminated groundwater per year. Depending on the outcome of current negotiations between EPA, the Potentially Responsible Parties, and the Watermaster, EPA's plan may also help in a more direct way. We expect that current negotiations will lead to an agreement on how much of the treated groundwater will be supplied to local utilities such as the District. Although there has been much discussion of efforts to export the treated water out of the San Gabriel Basin, we believe that any portion of the treated water needed locally should be made available to affected water purveyors.

Second, EPA is pursuing legal action against the parties responsible for the contamination. EPA has identified 19 parties that we believe are legally responsible for cleaning up the groundwater contamination, a majority of which have organized themselves into a group known as the Baldwin Park Operable Unit Steering Committee. We intend to negotiate an agreement with the Steering Committee by next year or, if negotiations are unsuccessful, use the Superfund trust fund to begin implementation of the project and pursue litigation against the PRPs. We had originally expected to negotiate an agreement by 1996, but complexities resulting from the "Consensus Approach" water distribution plan, and the discovery of perchlorate and NDMA, have delayed negotiations until next year.

Third, we have overseen efforts by the Steering Committee to develop a biological treatment process for removal of perchlorate from water, and facilitated the Steering Committee's financial contribution to ongoing studies of ion exchange processes by the Main San Gabriel Basin Watermaster. As you may know, EPA has also been working with the Steering Committee to construct a 500 gallons per minute biological treatment facility for removal of perchlorate at your wellfield.

In the last year, my staff have met periodically with your General Manager, Michael Berlien, to discuss ways in which EPA and the District can work jointly to clean up the groundwater contamination in the Baldwin Park area and meet the District's water supply needs. We see no conflict between pumping at the District's wells and EPA's cleanup objectives for the Baldwin Park Operable Unit (the BPOU), and believe that pumping at the District's wells will help limit downgradient movement of the contaminated groundwater. My staff looks forward to continuing to work with Mr. Berlien.

Yours,



Felicia Marcus
Regional Administrator